The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives Vol. 18, No 1, 2019, pp. 128-142
https://openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/index.php/IEJ

Using the concept of relational justice to apply fairness in schools

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This paper makes the case for fairness as a driver towards the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal of equitable quality education. We outline a dialogic fairness framework attending to the principles of relational justice in both the service of reducing educational inequalities and improving democratic qualities. The prominence of education as a theme in Fairness Commissions from many UK municipal councils afforded the opportunity to find out if and how fairness could be considered a driver of change towards greater equality in education. Our work with the Newcastle Fairness Commission generated a number of principles of fairness and education, as well as a framework to help operationalize these principles in schools, that we detail in this paper. The framework that was generated was one that recognizes fairness as a form of relational justice arising from a dialogic approach. It was based on a process that used multi-stakeholder interviews and a roundtable inquiry. Views arising from the process interviews and roundtable discussion were consistent with other research into young people's understandings of fairness and education. More research is needed to find out how fairness is understood and enacted by education stakeholders and how these conceptualizations, perspectives, and experiences might combine to improve educational equity and democratic qualities.

Keywords: social justice; fairness; relational justice; dialogic

THE ROLE OF FAIRNESS AS A DRIVER OF EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

Education's importance as a key global challenge is suggested by the 4th United Nation Sustainable Development Goal (UN SDG): "Quality education, aiming to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (United Nations, 2018). The other 16 UN SDGs rely on education to ensure the achievement of their targets. Although educational outcomes are internationally regarded as important as one measure of an equitable education system, wide inequalities persist throughout the education system in all countries (Ballas et al., 2012; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2012), including in the UK. In England a 25% of children are said to be not ready to start school and 16% leave without going on to education, training, or employment (Marmot et al., 2010). Children in the UK start school with considerably different levels of resources and display strong patterning by family origin in their attainment at every level (Gorard & Smith, 2010).

Numerous UK initiatives over recent years have attempted to "close the gap" (a term often used to describe the aim of these approaches), with policies focusing on the demand side (socioeconomic inequalities between different groups) and the supply side (inequalities in educational provision) (Nicaise, 2000; Ross, 2009). The main policy approaches aim for equality of opportunities, equality of treatment or equality of outcome, or combine these in a bid to increase social mobility. However, there is considerable debate and controversy with respect to how to interpret and act upon educational inequalities and, indeed, whether schools do much to address variations in educational outcomes between socioeconomic groups (Gorard & Smith, 2010). What is not in question is that marked educational stratification by socioeconomic background is a consistent feature of education systems world-wide. Gorard and Smith (2010) argues that the lack of evidence of schools having done much to dent this at a national level opens up the opportunity to consider other aspects of equity that foster democracy and citizenship activities, including respect, tolerance, and trust. Arguably, the concept of fairness, as we expand upon it in this paper, supports social justice aims that are narrowly focused on stratification and more broadly focused on other aspects of equity and quality in education. In education, fairness is often used synonymously with ideas of reducing inequality, closing the attainment gap and tackling underachievement; yet, what it means and, thus, how it is subsequently enacted is not clearly agreed upon and understood even within these aims. We argue that a broader conceptualization which encompasses these concerns but also goes beyond them is important in foregrounding a broad purpose for education that can encompass the democratic qualities foregrounded by Gorard and Smith (2010).

A further reason to draw on a wider set of social justice aims for education is that it is argued that approaches to tackle educational stratification alone have had little effect at the national level in the UK and have sometimes had negative, unintended consequences (Ball, 2010; Gorard & Smith, 2010). For instance, equality of outcome intentions concerned with equalizing attainment have resulted in policies that are likely to exacerbate the problem. The race to improve PISA scores has led to narrow pedagogy and curriculum that is at odds with evidence on what is needed for 21st Century learning (Sjøberg, 2015). Neither has this race lessened the attainment gap. Policies aimed at increasing choice and selection via testing can favour the advantaged who have access to resources either to exercise choice or provide coaching for selection tests (Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe, 1993; Reay, 2004, 2012; Vincent & Maxwell, 2016). The aim of closing the gap in educational attainment between economically advantaged and those not so advantaged is unlikely to succeed because policies to increase attainment are likely to impact on all, producing grade inflation and gains for all rather than attending to the gap itself. Policies based on equality of opportunities, such as increasing the school day to make extra-curricular activities open to all or providing a range of support services from the school, have increased the outcomes for some targeted groups but have failed to have widespread impact (Cummings, Dyson, & Todd, 2011). Bøyum (2014) summarizes the limitations of prevailing approaches, such as equal opportunity, as considering educational justice in isolation from social justice considerations in general. Gorard and Smith (2010) makes a similar point, stating that "Education mostly appears to reflect society . . . It is more an epiphenomenon than a determinant" (p. 50).

In a consideration of education in Oceania, Vavrus (2017) discusses how "metaphors and other forms of symbolic language used to describe educational dilemmas shape the responses that are imaginable in addressing them" (p. 5). Fairness is emerging as

conceptually promising in enabling ways to reframe and improve approaches to equitable quality education. Not only does fairness have potential due to its conceptual relevance, but also its use in common parlance makes it possibly accessible to all. Fairness as a concept is used in many different ways to imply a concern with differences in society and carries a normative meaning as something good, an idea which is at once intuitive and instinctive (Gorard & Smith, 2010; Perkins, 2013; Ryan, 2006). A generalizable definition of fairness has to attend to the negotiation of competing interests and, therefore, it makes these competing interests explicit and provides the possibility for some reconciliation of these interests. Fairness may, therefore, qualify, in Vavrus's terms, as helpful language. It is a concept that already has strong traction as a way of focusing attention on finding solutions across a range of areas, as is evidenced by the 30 Fairness Commissions carried out since 2010 by councils across the UK. All have taken as their starting point a conviction that widening inequality is neither natural nor intractable and that it can be tackled, and fairness has been assumed to be a driver in the achievement of solutions. Despite education featuring prominently in all Fairness Commissions, fairness as a concept in its own right has not historically been a driver of policy in education. However, it is becoming more visible internationally. Fairness is one of the values of elementary school reform in Turkey, for instance (Koc, Isiksal, & Bulut, 2007). Fairness was articulated as a concept used by teachers in Nigeria in terms of how they thought about instruction in the affective domain (Olubor & Ogonor, 2007) as defined by listening to, and willingness to participate and to compromise with others. The importance of fairness in terms of participation is exemplified by the involvement of Ghanaian citizens in policy making (Fredua-Kwarteng, 2016). Closing gaps in education requires equity, not uniformity, so in this sense, also, fairness is a useful concept (Thomas & McCormick, 2017).

FAIRNESS COMMISSIONS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

During the last decade, in a context of long-term national government spending cuts initiated in 2008, known as austerity, local governmental authorities in the UK have searched for new ways to address widening inequalities in their regions and improve the lives of residents. About 30 local areas have initiated Fairness Commissions across England, Scotland, and Wales over the last eight years, tasked with tackling the effects of poverty and inequality at a local level. These sought evidence from local people and made recommendations to local authorities on the actions they could take (New Economics Foundation, 2015). Although it has not been possible to assess the impact of the Fairness Commissions overall, there is some evidence that their recommendations have been acted upon: in raising wages from minimum wage to living wage; in exposing and limiting the activities of payday loan companies; in increasing the membership of credit unions; in improving the accessibility of advice services; and in changing the practices of private landlords on tenancy agreements and housing quality (New Economics Foundation, 2015).

While there has been extensive research exploring the views of young people about education (Lewis & Lindsay, 2000; Reay, 2006; Todd, 2007), there is very little research that seeks young people's views specifically about what counts as fair or otherwise in education. The concept could, therefore, enable us to gain a far better understanding of the range of stakeholder perspectives and hence the optimal way of integrating these to create the greatest possible buy-in. A Fabian Society report (Bamfield & Horton, 2010)

flags the lack of national outcry about the inequalities inherent in our educational system. We would argue that a more accessible concept, able to make explicit the range of differing ways in which stakeholders understand fairness and education, along with an associated framework through which to negotiate these, is needed in order to support dialogue and consensus building. This paper draws on a body of the authors' previous research into fairness and education (Laing, Mazzoli Smith, & Todd, 2016, 2018; Laing & Todd, 2012; Mazzoli Smith, Todd, & Laing, 2017) and particularly our analysis of a range of work produced for the Newcastle Fairness Commission. This is outlined below and underpins the development of our conceptualization of fairness.

In this paper, we focus, in particular, on the work that was commissioned by the Institute for Local Governance to support the Newcastle Fairness Commission by scoping and defining fairness in education, analysing evidence, and suggesting actions. Newcastle is a city in the North East region of England with a strong industrial heritage. With the decline of industry, the city has reinvented itself but unemployment is still higher than the national average and socioeconomic deprivation is widespread. The Fairness Commission was set up in an attempt to make Newcastle a fairer, more cohesive city and the membership was a diverse range of individuals drawn from politics, religion, academia, health, and the charitable and voluntary sector. The Newcastle Fairness Commission was unique in concluding with a set of fairness principles to be applied, rather than a specific plan of action on the city or the nation (Newcastle Fairness Commission, 2012). These can be summarized as: "fair share, fair play, fair go, fair say," which became the title of the report. The thinking was that the principles would be longer lasting than a necessarily time-limited action plan. The aim of our study was to define fairness in education, how fairness was being enacted in Newcastle, and to identify actions that could be taken to ensure Newcastle became a fairer city in respect of education. The outcomes were based on data from:

a) A multi-stakeholder roundtable carried out in 2012 with 14 people representing the academic, local government, school, and charity sectors (including teachers, head teachers and young people) interviews with three people who were sitting on the Newcastle commission and a literature review into fairness and education that led to the writing of a report for the Newcastle Fairness Commission (Laing & Todd, 2012). As part of the roundtable, short provocations were given by two academics, the two headteachers, and a local authority officer.
b) A short paper of ideas and questions for a second roundtable carried out in 2014 on fairness and education, with a group of 17 stakeholders (representing the academic, local government, school, and charity sector) in order to look further at fairness as a possible driver of more equitable education. As part of the roundtable, short provocations were given by two academics, a teacher. and a member of the Royal Society of Arts.

A starting point was to situate the fairness principles agreed to by the Newcastle Fairness Commission in the context of education. Fairness in education needs to apply to people of all ages, not just children, and our research aimed to draw attention to this wide focus. However, the limited time for our enquiry meant that examples are more often drawn from schooling than from the various guises of adult learning. The interviews and roundtable discussion were recorded and analysed for themes which were translated into a range of broad meanings of fairness. It was important to include children in our enquiry

since their position as experts on their experiences of schooling and education gives them a role, but we were mindful of the need to enable them to take part in the roundtable in ways that were comfortable, appropriate, and where they felt freely able to contribute should they want to, but could choose not to (Laing & Todd, 2012; Todd, 2007). Two children aged 14 were accompanied at the roundtable by a teacher. One chose to write a story on his ideas about fairness focused on a boy who received free school meals, and this was a secret from other children but one day a teacher told everyone. He wrote that "Fairness is when people can do what other people do." It is important that children are included in consultations about what is fair and unfair since there is evidence that their sense of fairness is sophisticated. Previous essentialized psychological ideas of children's moral understanding have been challenged (Smith, 2002). More is now understood about children's conceptions of fairness across different contexts and cultures and how their sense of fairness is shaped in part by cultural practices, values, and norms (Barrance & Elwood, 2018; Blake et al., 2015; Kajanus, McAuliffe, Warneken, & Blake, 2018; Laddu & Kapadia, 2007; Zhang, 2016).

THE EMERGING FAIRNESS FRAMEWORK

We identified a variety of understandings of fairness from the interviews and roundtable of informants in our study. These understandings influenced how policies were implemented at a local level, and also influenced expectations that professionals had in respect of individual children. Achieving fairness in education was seen to be predicated on choices that were made by individual educational leaders. For example, one headteacher told us of a choice headteachers felt that they had to make in the context of austerity: to focus their attention and resources on raising achievement so that all children achieve a minimum standard or targeting those resources towards children who, with additional support, are capable of achieving the highest standards. Which approach is deemed fair will differ between headteachers and either choice could be justified as fair depending on the underlying values and principles brought into focus. In this way, schools were seen to be in a position to promote fairness within their contexts but also face difficult choices without necessarily having structures in place to support the evaluation of competing aims.

Building on Jacob's (2010) three-dimensional model of equal opportunity and the six areas of justice proposed by Gorard and Smith (2010), we were able to identify seven broad meanings to define fairness in education:

1. Fair process as being treated the same
2. Fair process in the way that different provision is allocated or experienced
3. Fairness as minimizing divergence in educational attainment across social groups
4. Fairness as achieving the same standard
5. Fairness as meeting the needs of diverse individuals
6. Fair participation in decision-making
7. Fair participation in learning.

These open up space to identify areas of tension and contradiction in policy and practice because these principles take full account of fundamental tensions, for instance, of fair process in treating people equally (principle 1) and fairness in terms of meeting diverse individual needs (principle 5). Our enquiry, therefore, uncovered a multifaceted understanding of what counts for a fair education. It was not only about equality, for

instance with respect to opportunities and resources, but also equity with respect to outcomes about embracing diversity. Points made at the roundtables commonly included the following:

> Fairness needs to be careful not to focus on one thing, e.g. attainment gap and income, as there are other ways fairness needs to be considered: age, gender, disability, ethnicity, for example.
>
> Collaboration between schools is potentially very useful for fairness—schools have more equality of provision (particularly when resources can be shared and there are economies of scale) and better consistency in provision.
>
> Don't just focus on the obvious (i.e. results) (e.g. equivalent of toxic waste in environment)—need to think of education as wider—Special Educational Needs, play, lifelong learning 0-90yrs.
>
> It (fairness is) about poverty related to education, education linked to poverty. Economic policy link to education policy.
>
> Everyone leaves school knowing what they're good at.
>
> Is support available and do people feel not stigmatized to access it. Is there a culture of community support?
>
> "Nothing about me, without me"—Children should not have decisions imposed without taking part in the decision.
>
> Chance to meet people from different backgrounds/careers/experiences.

This was a heterogeneous conceptualization of education and fairness, and therefore our understandings go further than Rawls' (1972) principle of fair equality of opportunity and his related concept of distributional justice; although, we do agree with Rawls' identification of fairness as a foundational concept in his theory of "justice as fairness'"

RELATIONAL JUSTICE AND EDUCATION RESEARCH

Fairness is a word used throughout society to describe, justify, and contextualize our interactions with each other. It is, therefore, a fundamentally relational concept, which is meaningful only in considering others. However, decisions are often taken about the distribution and redistribution of educational resources based on considerations of what constitutes fairness at either individual or group level. A distributional approach to social justice is inadequate without including a more holistic conceptualization of social life. Our understanding of fairness thus encompasses another idea with respect to social justice: that of relational justice. We suggest relational justice is a broad term that can be used to cover a variety of forms of justice and which draws on different antecedents, but which clearly positions interpersonal relationships and the social context as being critical in considering social justice claims. We, therefore, draw on relational justice in recognition of the centrality of the nature of the relationships that structure society (Gewirtz, 1998) and which must then structure any consideration of fairness. Relational justice might include considerations of distribution as well as procedural or cultural aspects, but it is about more than these, as discussed by Gewirtz:

> It is about the nature and ordering of social relations, the formal and informal rules which govern how members of society treat each other both on a macro level and at a micro interpersonal level. Thus, is refers to the practices and procedures which

> govern the organization of political systems, economic and social institutions, families and one-to-one social relationships. (p. 471)

We have previously drawn on Gewirtz (1998) to explore two concepts of relational justice: justice as mutuality and justice as recognition. Justice as mutuality is encapsulated by Etzioni's (1995) theory of communitarianism, in which citizens are bound together through a system of duties and mutual obligations. There is neither excessive autonomy, which erodes society, nor excessive collectivism, which erodes individual autonomy. Our previous research (Laing et al., 2016) identified that educational professionals saw "justice as mutuality" and the need for fair participation within a community as important to their practice of education. Further research with young people in different school contexts (Mazzoli Smith et al., 2017), showed how important the quality of interpersonal relationships was to understandings of fairness and of student engagement and successful learning experiences, whatever the school context. Pupils articulated a belief in how discrimination and lack of respect impinged on a basic inviolable right to self-determination and almost all forms of discriminatory practice were deemed unacceptable. There were, therefore, concerns about equality of outcome aims compromising relational justice through discrimination based on difference claims, with widening participation programs, for instance, mentioned as entrenching, not eroding, divisions in the system and, therefore, compromising relational justice. The students in this study tended to prioritize respectful, egalitarian relationships over differential treatment according to need or other forms of distributive justice based on outcomes. However, the latter was described as fair in particular cases when it did not violate key rights of other students.

We draw on Fraser's (1997, 2008) ideas about fair participation, named as both recognition and representation. Recognition is about who counts and is valued, and representation is to do with who is involved in taking decisions about redistribution and recognition. Relational justice is allied to the concerns of justice as recognition and as such demarcates a significant development from the Rawlsian concept of distributive justice (Rawls, 1972). Fraser's (1998) development of Rawls rests on the proposition that redistribution and recognition are not independent conceptions of justice, distinct from each other; rather, some concepts, such as gender and race, may require both kinds of justice to fully deal with them. Fraser, therefore, proposes a bivalent concept of justice, which draws on both redistribution and justice, but neither is subsumed by the other. So, for the students in our study (Mazzoli Smith et al., 2017), redistribution and recognition would have to be understood as bivalent in Fraser's terminology: linked but not reducible to each other.

This research identified the usefulness of advancing a concept of relational justice in its own right because it foregrounded the fact that students described the centrality of relationships in considerations of both distributive and recognitive justice. We (Mazzoli Smith et al., 2017), therefore, argued for the more explicit development of educational policy based on relational justice. Education policy is not likely to be informed by relational justice, however, as its units of interest tend to be either the individual or the group and, as such, we suggested that this, along with the concept of "stakes" fairness (see Jacobs, 2010), might be considered a policy vacuum. There is some reference in educational research to allied concepts, such as relational equality or relational equity, which indicates some interest in foregrounding the relational aspects of social justice considerations. For instance, Winter (2018) draws on a concept of relational justice

informed by Fraser to consider "relational equality" at the macro, meso, and micro levels of social life. Winter finds that a broad focus at all these levels leads to challenges in terms of ascertaining how to evaluate equality and/or justice and, so, she suggests schools may want to focus on the meso level wherein they have control over the quality of the relationships that pertain. This has parallels with Gorard and Smith's (2010) focus on schools as "mini-societies in themselves" (p. 60). Winter draws on the affordances of humanistic counselling skills to improve the quality of relationships while Gorard and Smith draws on the importance of pupils enjoying mutually respectful relationships with adults in helping to shape the kind of society we would like.

Boaler (2008) utilizes the term "relational equity," to describe equitable relationships in classrooms; that is, students treating each other with respect and considering other points of view fairly. Boaler also contrasts this with outcomes-based measures of equity, so the focus is shifted from measures of achievement between students to the quality of relationships between them. For Boaler, relational equity depends on the three qualities of: respect for other people's ideas, leading to positive intellectual relations; commitment to the learning of others; and learned methods of communication and support. Boaler's definition of relational equity highlights the need for both a social aspect, seen through respectful communication, and an intellectual aspect, seen through the ability to think critically and reflectively in order to accommodate the differences between students working in groups and maintain "positive intellectual relations" (p. 174).

HOW CAN FAIRNESS BE OPERATIONALIZED?

A main theme from the analysis of interviews and the roundtable discussion was that fairness entailed some form of progressive universalism that recognizes equitable provision for all children, but that some form of targeting would be necessary with a scale and intensity proportionate to some assessment of need. Targeting could be in terms of access to resources, such as additional teaching, out of school activities, or coaching and mentoring. This has similarities in the approach needed to reduce inequalities in health (Marmot et al., 2010). We also identified a clear strand of critical and reflective thinking about the nature and purpose of education, and about the ways that the identity and abilities of a child are a reflection of the socio-cultural culture that includes home, school, and community rather than aspects of an individual identity. We identified arguments being made by our informants for the need to develop a more holistic, locality-based educational provision, the need for more collaboration between schools, and the wish to offer a range of activities and services from schools for families and the community.

Decisions on what action to take to improve fairness were, therefore, context specific, and dependent on the view of fairness adopted. Fairness in education is also a process, likely never to be arrived at given its attendance to multiple perspectives, which must continually be made explicit through dialogue in order for there to be negotiation and the likelihood of meaningful outcome. Our roundtable was an example of a dialogic process about these competing claims of fair education, and the roundtable discussions recommended the need for dialogue within and between schools and other stakeholders in education to arrive at a conception of fair education.

> We need some kind of audit—to find out about and encourage collaboration and shared resources.

> Some kind of review—to find a more integrated approach—need to look at how joined up local authority departments are.
>
> A difference friendly world—How would you assess difference? It's about valuing difference.

While it is not difficult to identify instances of unfairness in schooling as experienced by individuals, including by those who go on to succeed in the education system, there is no single initiative or action or even sets of actions that will improve fairness in education in a generalizable way that could have comprehensive buy-in. It depends on many aspects of a situation, the people involved, and the resources available. Therefore, we devised a fairness audit that could be conducted as a reflective and inclusive exercise, designed to enable thinking and understanding across and between stakeholders within an educational establishment or across a number of establishments to enable them to prioritize action together through making explicit what constitutes fair education. This was a process designed for the city Council itself, with its partners, with the aim of surfacing meanings and tensions and encouraging practice that is effective, critical, and informed. This was to be seen as a tool for staff development and reflective practice rather than representing a pass/fail standard. A fairness audit was devised with the following qualities—the "five Cs" (Laing & Todd, 2012):

1. **Contextualized**—by taking account of the current context and examining practice within, between, and beyond educational institutions. An audit of fair practice in education should take account of the context within which fairness is enacted and examine not just the practices within educational institutions such as schools but also examine practice between and beyond them. Staff should reflect on how these different interlinking contexts provide opportunities to enact fair practices.
2. **Collaborative**—with all those involved in delivering and participating in education. Dialogue about fair educational practices should include all those with an interest in education, including children, young people, and parents and carers as well as staff and external partners. Collaboration and discussion can help to uncover differing understandings of fairness, facilitate consensus building, and lead to effective action.
3. **Critical**—the importance of a dialogic process to critique policy, practice, and the language we use to talk about education that might draw on the traditions of action research or use theory of change approaches, possibly supported by an external "critical friend," making use of educational research findings. This can serve to challenge negative assumptions and expectations about disadvantage and provide new ways of thinking.
4. **Capability-driven**—concentrating on expanding the capacities of young people and valuing their contributions. A fairness audit should prioritize valuing the contribution and identifying the capacity of young people as opposed to focusing on deficits. Investigating how an educational system or institution restricts capabilities in respect of, for example, gender, ethnicity, or disability can facilitate this.
5. **Conceptualized**—making sense of the situation and prioritizing action. A fairness audit will identify and reflect on different enactments of fairness in the school system and recognize where fairness is compromised. It concludes by making sense of the situation at hand and identifying priorities for action.

A DIALOGIC FAIRNESS FRAMEWORK DRAWING ON THE PRINCIPLES OF RELATIONAL JUSTICE

We suggest that this audit framework draws on the main premises of relational justice in order to increase the breadth of social justice claims that are routinely drawn on in education and because of the clear fit between these premises and those found in our work outlined above. Gewirtz (1998) highlights the practical possibilities inherent in utilizing relational justice in this way, in that "[a] focus on relational justice can force us to think carefully and systematically about what treating each other with respect and conferring dignity on others actually means in different contexts" (p. 472). Gewirtz draws on Young's (2011) approach to social justice, in particular, as one which should support a more context-sensitive understanding, central to the findings of our work in the Fairness Commission. Young's approach attempts to extend the concept of distribution beyond material goods to phenomena such as power and oppression and, in so doing, offers a useful way of conceptualizing social justice and, we would suggest, fairness claims in differing contexts. The approach recognizes that the logic of distribution treats non-material goods as identifiable things or bundles, distributed in a static pattern among identifiable, separate individuals. The individualism assumed in this distributive approach to social justice and foregrounding of individuals and structures often obscures issues of dominance and oppression, which requires a more process-oriented and relational conceptualization (Young, 2011, p. 8).

A focus on process in such an in-depth way brings into view the differences between subjects where, in a primarily distributive view, assumptions of impartiality hide the realities of decision-making processes in context, which, in turn, depoliticizes public policy formation and undermines opportunities for the democratic process. Justice as recognition means attending to the differences and relationships between subjects and, thereby, the social processes of decision-making in context, attending to social relations, power, oppression, and self-respect, which cannot be considered as static. The fairness audit was designed to take account of these issues and then, in turn, these contextual, relational, and procedural aspects were endorsed by the stakeholders and exemplified in the democratic qualities of the Fairness Commission. Young (2011) notes that a highly individualized, ahistorical understanding of justice (her critique of the distributive model) fails to account for how much individual identities and capacities are produced as a result of social processes and in relation with others. These identities and capacities are also produced over time, so a measure of distribution and outcomes at one point in time fails to account for the temporal nature of social relations. This, we would argue, supports our focus on fairness as a process, never achievable but supporting what should be an ever-present, ongoing negotiation of the perspectives on which decisions towards the aim of a fair education system can best be made. This relies on a more democratic process than a top-down principle-based decision about distributive justice might.

Young (2011) was also concerned about the way in which the normative is overlooked in political science so that, too often, structures that should be considered evaluatively are taken-for-granted. Along with social scientists such as Sayer (2005), Young (2011) critiques the routine separation of the empirical and the normative in social science, such that social justice can be researched and theorized abstracted from actual social contexts:

> The ideal of impartiality is an idealist fiction. It is impossible to adopt an unsituated moral point of view, and if a point of view is situated, then it cannot be universal, it cannot stand apart from and understand all points of view. (p. 104)

For Young (2011), claims can too often be abstracted from "some substantive premises of social life" (p. 4), which are necessary in order to arrive at useful measures of justice and injustice. Gewirtz and Cribb (2002) make use of this point in reference to a tendency in sociological analysis that they call "critique from above," something that takes place at a distance from the realm of practice and, therefore, without consideration of the situated nature of the justice considerations that are made. For instance, the practical difficulties for teachers in resolving or accommodating the tensions in implementing socially just practices are too often overlooked (Gewirtz & Cribb, 2002). We suggest that the fairness framework presented here takes account of the situated nature of justice considerations through its contextualized and conceptualized qualities, avoiding deference to an abstracted view of social justice concerns.

Gewirtz and Cribb (2002) further note "a common failure to adequately engage with the tensions that may arise between different facets of or claims to social justice" (p. 499), which results from the failure to appreciate that social justice is plural (Gewirtz, 1998), demanding both distributive and recognitive considerations and surfacing tensions in the process, as these are likely not to neatly align into one clear course of action. For Gewirtz and Cribb (2002), it is, therefore, important to adequately engage with these tensions, such that the work of practitioners of various sorts can be supported. We suggest that the collaborative approach that underpins the fairness audit foregrounds these tensions and supports democratic processes by affording recognition of competing views. Recognitive justice is likely to attempt to balance the apparently oppositional moral obligations of difference, and solidarity. This is, then, "valuable because it can inform more socially just micro practices" (Gewirtz, 1998, p. 476). The focus on what people do and how this is patterned changes the way we approach key issues in education, such as opportunity, for instance. From a relational perspective, opportunity is a concept of enablement, as opposed to a possession as it would be thought of from a distributive one and it, therefore, refers more to "doing" than "having"": "A person has opportunities if he or she is not constrained from doing things and lives under the enabling conditions for doing them" (Young, 2011, p. 26). At its simplest, this will mean that children do not all have equally enabling opportunities, even when the same resources are devoted to them through the structures of economic distribution. This is taken account of by the audit's focus on capabilities and criticality in terms of reflecting on the policies, practices, and discourses of education.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we suggest that fairness as a concept can encompass a less instrumental, broader understanding of equitable quality education than that of just raising the educational attainment of the most disadvantaged, or closing educational gaps, important though these are. We then argue that what is needed is a process whereby policymakers, in collaboration with schools and local stakeholders, engage over time to audit the fairness of their policies and practices, to open up space to understand different interests, and critical appraisal of areas of contradiction, in order to develop an education system which many more see as fair. The fairness audit process outlined above, resulting from initial work carried out for one of the many UK Fairness Commissions and integrating research carried out by the authors, suggests one way in which fairness can be operationalized as a concept with the aim of maximum buy-in from stakeholders. It also draws on an area of theorizing about social justice, which, we argue, is under-utilized in

education but foregrounded by young people in one of our studies where fairness was put under the spotlight. We argue, therefore, that the strengths of this approach, harnessing the concept of fairness, allied to the principles of relational justice, in a dialogic fairness framework, are that it is likely to make explicit and provide the possibility of negotiating conflicting views, take account of context and temporality, support democratic qualities, and go beyond the widespread problem in educational theorizing focusing either on the individual or the groups at the expense of the relationships that structure these. More research is needed to reveal further how fairness is understood and enacted by education stakeholders and how these conceptualizations, perspectives, and experiences might combine to drive a reduction in what is widely perceived to be an unfair educational system in the UK and in other nations.

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